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C O N F I D E N T I A L PESHAWAR 000035

E.O. 12958: DECL: 2/24/2019
TAGS: [PTER](#) [MOPS](#) [PGOV](#) [PK](#)
SUBJECT: MILITANT BOMBING OF BRIDGE IN KHYBER FAILS

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REASON: 1.4 (d)

Summary

11. (C) Militants placed three bombs at a bridge on the Peshawar-Torkham Highway on February 20, one of which exploded at approximately 6:30 am local time, causing no death or significant damage. Traffic flow resumed by 8:30 am. Militants also fired a rocket at a fuel tanker 11 km from the Torkham border on February 21, killing the driver, but not disturbing the load. The attacks represent a continuation of militant attempts to disrupt U.S./NATO supply routes through Pakistan to Afghanistan. Thus far, the government has responded quickly to keep traffic moving on this key transportation corridor. End summary.

Militants Target Bridge on Khyber Supply Route

12. (C) On February 20, militants targeted a single-lane RCC (Reinforced Cement Concrete) bridge on the critical Peshawar-Torkham Highway, in the village of Natara. The 40 meter long Natara Bridge lies near the Khassadar checkpoint of Zintarra, about 15 km from the Afghanistan border crossing at Torkham and 23 km from Jamrud. According to the commander of the Khassadar force in Landi Kotal, at approximately 2:00 am on February 20, a group of 15-20 militants overcame two Khassadars posted at Natara Bridge and planted three bombs on the abutments to the bridge. At about 6:30 am on the morning of February 20, one of the three bombs exploded.

No Death or Damage; Traffic Flow Resumed

13. (C) No death or injuries were reported as a result of the Natara Bridge explosion. Engineers and a bomb disposal unit destroyed the two unexploded devices, with one man injured during the disposal "due to negligence," according to the Khassadar commander. Post contacts described damage to the bridge as "minor" and "superficial," observing that traffic flow resumed in both directions by 8:30 am. They added vehicle traffic was heavier and slower than normal as a result of the blast, but still moving.

February 21 Attack on Fuel Tanker

¶4. (C) Militants also fired a rocket at a fuel tanker 11 km from the Torkham border on February 21. The rocket hit the front-cab of the truck, killing the driver, but the fuel load was not disturbed.

Vulnerable Spots on the Khyber Supply Route

¶5. (C) There are 12 causeways (paved roads elevated on a sandbank) and 10 bridges on the Peshawar-Torkham Highway between Jamrud and Landi Kotal. Because the route from Jamrud to Landi Kotal cuts through mountainous terrain, the road crosses many gorges, culverts, water channels and streams. During very heavy rains, several times per year, traffic will be temporarily blocked due to flooding. The mission's Narcotics Affairs Section (NAS) plans to convert the four single-lane bridges, including the Natara Bridge, to double-lane crossings in order to reduce traffic jams. The remaining six bridges on the Khyber route already contain two lanes.

Spotty Security on the Khyber Supply Route

¶6. (C) The Khyber Political Agent told post that he normally stations a few Khassadars at each bridge on the Peshawar-Torkham Highway for security. About 30 Khassadars are stationed at the nearest Khassadar post at Zintarra. But militants can easily overwhelm the small number of lightly-armed Khassadars posted at bridges, as occurred the evening of February 20. Low wages and poor morale continue to plague the Khassadar forces which usually stand guard in the open, leaving them particularly vulnerable to attack. On February 6, a suicide bomber killed two bridge guards in Jamrud Tehsil when they tried to stop his vehicle.

Militant Attacks on Khyber Supply Route Continue

¶7. (C) On February 7, Tehrik-i-Taliban (TTP) announced that it would continue to stage attacks that disrupt U.S./NATO supplies to Afghanistan. The 10 bridges on the Peshawar-Torkham Highway, as well as the cargo terminals in Peshawar, will serve as inviting targets for militants. The February 21 militant rocket attack on the fuel tanker on the Peshawar-Torkham Highway represents another type of inviting target to militants.

Comment

¶8. (C) The bombing of the Natara Bridge on February 20 and the Ali Masjid Bridge on February 3 represent a continuation of militant attempts to disrupt U.S./NATO supply routes through Pakistan to Afghanistan. With a more robust Frontier Corps presence in Khyber aimed at preventing spectacular attacks such as the one in November that netted militants a Humvee and other supplies, militants appear to have shifted tactics to remote devices and dark hour attacks on infrastructure. Thus far, the government has responded quickly to keep traffic moving on this key transportation corridor.

TRACY